

September 2005

State and Regional Needs Assessment

Master Plan Policy Proposal 6: Meeting Regional Higher Education Needs

Introduction

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) is scheduled at its October 27 meeting to adopt the 2005 State and Regional Needs Assessment. The HECB, in conjunction with other state agencies and institutions, is charged with stewardship of state higher education resources. In response to this charge, and consistent with the strategic master plan for higher education, the statewide and regional needs assessment provides a planning tool that, in conjunction with analysis of institutional role and mission, will drive academic program and facility planning and approval.

The needs assessment will allow for data driven decisions related to the allocation of student enrollments (master plan implementation strategy 2) by providing a comprehensive assessment of regional higher education needs to meet student, employer, and community demand, (master plan implementation strategy 6).

Legislative Direction and Related Policy Issues

The development of the needs assessment is a response to legislation passed in 2004, (House Bill 3103) which calls for a “comprehensive and ongoing assessment process to analyze the need for additional degrees and programs, additional off-campus centers and locations for degree programs, and consolidation or elimination of programs by the four-year institutions.” (RCW 28B.76.230)

On a biennial basis the HECB will release updates to the needs assessment report that, using the most recent data available, examine:

- (a) Projections of student, employer, and community demand for higher education and academic degrees, including liberal arts degrees, on a regional and statewide basis;
- (b) Current and projected degree programs and enrollment at public and private institutions of higher education, by location and mode of service delivery; and
- (c) Data from the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges on the supply and demand for work force education and certificates and associate degrees.

The legislation also requires the HECB to develop an assessment, conducted jointly on a biennial basis with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, of the gap between the number of forecasted net job openings at each level of higher education and number of prepared workers with the appropriate training and credentials needed to match the forecast of net job openings. Elements of this assessment are included in the 2005 State and Regional Needs assessment, and will also be the subject of a separate joint report which will be presented to the board at a future meeting.

The Role of the Needs Assessment in Academic Planning

The needs assessment will be an integral part of the program and facility planning process. In addition, it is an essential step in the development of future recommendations on the allocation of student enrollments, high demand enrollments, and reconfiguration of higher education resources in the state of Washington.

Under the revised program and facilities guidelines, approved at the September 22 HECB meeting, new academic degree program proposals will reference the statewide and regional needs assessment. Programs submitted for approval will be evaluated based on the degree to which they align with state needs outlined in the statewide needs assessment and the strategic master plan. Proposals must specifically address student, employer, and community demand for the program and demonstrate that projected capacity at public and private institutions is not sufficient to meet this demand.

Development of new facilities, including teaching sites, centers, or new institutions, would also need to reference a need identified through the needs assessment process. For example, the regional analysis indicates a number of regions that will need to grow significantly in order to keep pace with population growth.

Finally, in conjunction with a complete academic program inventory and a review of institutional role and mission, the needs assessment will be a critical element in the development of specific recommendations on changes of the “shape” of higher education called for in the strategic master plan.

Response to Feedback from the Board and Stakeholders

At the September meeting, the board provided comments on the draft needs assessment. In addition, HECB staff have received comments from other stakeholders including institutional officials and other agencies. Based on this feedback and additional review of the draft document, staff have made various changes to the final document. These include editing revisions and technical corrections and the following substantive changes.

The recommendations included in the executive summary have been revised to more closely match the language used in section VIII of the report. In addition, based on feedback from institutional representatives, staff have added a recommendation related to the need to increase

the numbers of K-12 teachers and administrators in key shortage areas. These include, but are not limited to, special education, math, science, English as a second language, and most administrative and support areas as defined by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In section VI of the report, language has been added to the discussion of the alignment between workforce supply and employer demand. The key change to this section is a more detailed discussion of the rationale to focus on the match between supply and demand in occupational areas rather than the aggregate match of bachelor's degrees and openings for workers at that level. The revised language includes a discussion of net in-migration of workers to the state and of limitations in assessing the educational needs of workers and preferences of employers using the available data.

In addition, this section was edited to clarify findings related to the need for additional graduates in the humanities and social sciences to fill gaps in the occupational forecast. The revised language clarifies the finding that humanities would be expected to continue to grow with overall enrollment such that no specific strategy is recommended to address the gaps in this area. In the social sciences, the data suggest that targeted growth in specific academic and professional programs may be required to close the gap between supply and demand.

Staff Recommendation

Higher Education Coordinating Board staff recommend that the board adopt the **2005 State and Regional Needs Assessment**.